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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1454  
INFO RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 1783  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0246  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 6642

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001767

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE AND NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2014  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IS](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAELIS STILL SEEKING ACCESS TO POLITICAL LEVEL

REF: TEL AVIV 2588

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) During a recent conversation with us, Israeli Embassy DCM Menahem Kanafi described Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor Binyamin Ben Eliezer's November 23 - 24 visit to Ankara as a modest step towards his government's goal of re-establishing a reliable communication channel to the GoT's senior political level. Given the harshness of PM Erdogan's repeated criticisms of Israel since the Israel Defense Force's "Cast Lead" Gaza operations of a year ago, Kanafi was relieved the GoT permitted the visit at all. He was pleased President Gul agreed to receive Ben Eliezer, "a relatively junior minister," but worried that meeting may have been granted more out of deference to prominent Turkish Jewish businessman Jak Kamhi, who brokered it, rather than to a GoT decision to improve public discourse with Israel. During that meeting, according to Kanafi, Gul urged Ben Eliezer to relieve Gazans' humanitarian plight, but did so "without hostility."

¶2. (C) MFA Israel Affairs Department Head Ali Reza Guney said Gul's reception of Ben Eliezer was, indeed, intended as a positive signal. "We value the relationship," he said. "Our criticism is that of a friend; it's not a policy reorientation." He emphasized, however, the Turkish public's keen interest in improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza. He described Israel's willingness to improve that situation as one of two prerequisites for improved relations. The other is an Israeli invitation to Turkey to resume its suspended mediation effort between Israel and Syria. Guney interpreted Ben Eliezer as actively exploring the potential for such an invitation with his Turkish interlocutors. That would "motivate us," he said, towards serious consideration of a calendar for senior-level visits. Kanafi said Ben Eliezer had not extended a mediation invitation. "He had no mandate." The Israeli cabinet would have had to authorize an invitation and it has not yet done so.

¶3. (C) Kanafi said the GoI's intermediate goal now becomes a visit to Turkey by Defense Minister Ehud Barak. In January, the Israeli MFA Director General (deputy secretary-equivalent) will come to Ankara hoping to lay the groundwork for a Barak visit. Barak, Kanafi confirmed, is the cabinet member most committed to the relationship with Turkey.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The Israeli Embassy is acutely aware it has no one at senior GoT levels to whom it can turn to manage a crisis. Unfortunately, in this region, the next crisis is always just around the corner.  
Silliman

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